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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000566

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2022

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: NEC PROCLAIMS APC CANDIDATE ERNEST KOROMA SIERRA
LEONE PRESIDENT

REF: A. FREETOWN 552 B. FREETOWN 547 C. FREETOWN 542 D. FREETOWN 508 E. FREETOWN 503 F. FREETOWN 501 G. FREETOWN 493 H. FREETOWN 484 I. FREETOWN

Classified By: CDA Elizabeth Pratt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. On September 17, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) announced that opposition APC Candidate Ernest Bai Koroma had won the September 8 Presidential run-off election. He will be sworn in the same day at 1700 GMT at the State House. Jubilant APC supporters thronged the streets, waving red flags denoting the APC color. As expected, the run-off election was close, with only a 9.2 percent margin between the two candidates. More irregularities were noted in the run-off election than on the initial August 11 round. However, the NEC noted that these irregularities did not alter the election's outcome. The week between the run-off and the final announcement was tense but the majority of Sierra Leoneans waited patiently for the results, illustrating their desire for peace and stability to remain in Sierra Leone. Prior to the announcement NEC internal divisions were publicly played out when two commissioners, each representing SLPP strong holds, refused to concur with the final announcement. Despite their withdrawal the NEC still had a quorum. Throughout the electoral process, the NEC remained a positive force in ensuring that this election was transparent and fair and that the voice of Sierra Leone was heard. END SUMMARY.

NEC DECLARES KOROMA PRESIDENT

12. (U) CDA and poloff attended the 10 a.m. September 17 press conference during which Dr. Christiana Thorpe, the NEC Chief Electoral Commissioner, proclaimed the opposition All People's Congress (APC) candidate Ernest Bai Koroma to be the next President of Sierra Leone. NEC official results show that Koroma won 54.6% of the valid votes cast with a total of 950,407 votes, while the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) candidate, Vice President Solomon Berewa, won only 45.4 percent with a total of 789,651 valid votes. The voter turnout rate of 68.09 percent fell below the 75.8 percent turnout on August 11. Of the total votes cast, 1,740,058 were declared valid and 43,793 votes, or 2.5 percent of the total, were invalidated.

13. (U) Immediately after the announcement, a loud cheer went up throughout Freetown, which has traditionally been an APC stronghold. Jubilant, but peaceful, APC supporters poured into the streets waving banners and dressed in red, the APC color. Police and military were in evidence patrolling the streets in an effort to maintain an orderly environment.

TALLYING AND INVESTIGATING THE RESULTS

13. (U) Compared to the August 11 election, Koroma received a much wider margin of winning votes, increasing the spread from 5.4 to 9.2 percent. This increase reflects that many of those who voted for third parties, such as PMDC, in the last election this time cast their votes for APC. PMDC candidate Charles Margai had received 13.9 percent of the August 11 vote and had encouraged his supporters to vote for APC in the run-off. While some leadership within the PMDC party publicly criticized Margai's decision, it is apparent that many PMDC supporters followed Margai's lead.

14. (U) Some votes were declared invalid as a result of ballot box stuffing. The NEC had determined that polling stations reporting between 95 percent and 99.9 percent voter turnout would be investigated only if a complaint was raised by party agents or district NEC office. Stations with 100 percent turnout would warrant an immediate investigation, and stations with more than 100 percent voter turnout would be immediately invalidated. The NEC Commissioner noted that the need to thoroughly investigate these cases of over-voting was the primary reason for the delay in announcing the final results. As a result of their investigations, the NEC invalidated all results from 477 polling stations throughout the 14 electoral districts. The NEC confirmed that the invalidation of these votes did not affect the final electoral outcome, and, in accordance with international standards, did not require a repeat vote.

NEC RIFT PUBLICLY PLAYS OUT

15. (U) The NEC rift (noted reftel 547) became a public chasm at the final NEC press conference before a packed room of media and international observers. Prior to the start of the press briefing, the two NEC Commissioners representing the South and East regions, which enjoy strong SLPP support, announced individually they would excuse themselves from the press conference because they did not agree with the way the invalidations were handled. Dr. Thorpe promptly pointed out that the Commission consists of five Commissioners and that only a quorum of three is required to reach a final decision. Thus, the results announced would be valid.

TENSE WEEK PRECEDING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

16. (U) Rising tension among Sierra Leoneans awaiting the

run-off results in the week preceding the announcement were prevalent throughout the country. Several local newspapers, particularly the pro-SLPP Awareness Times, published incendiary accusations against the NEC and international community. These media outlets were publicly reprimanded by the NEC, the National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG), and the International Media Commission (IMC) for attempting to damage the integrity of the election process and results.

¶17. (U) On September 12, President Kabbah addressed the nation urging Sierra Leoneans to have faith in the NEC and to avoid spreading rumors, which hurt the nation as a whole. He stressed the need to consolidate peace and stability in the country and condemned the violence prior to the election. He urged all Sierra Leoneans to accept the results of the Presidential race. President Kabbah claimed he was no longer the leader of SLPP, but rather considers himself the father of the nation. As such, he urged people to use the proper legal channels to address electoral complaints.

¶18. (U) At the September 13 NEC press conference, Dr. Christiana Thorpe reported that the NEC Commissioners and staff were receiving an increasing number of threats and requested that such acts of intimidation cease immediately. She even went so far as to publicly name one individual who had been harassing Commissioners by phone, noting his misuse of their personal telephone numbers &as, to say the least, unprofessional.8 Both CDA and poloff attended each NEC press conference and noted an increased level of armed security surrounding the Commissioners, particularly Dr. Thorpe, as the week progressed.

DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO EARLIER SLPP INJUNCTION
FILING

¶19. (C) On Saturday, September 15, the SLPP party filed an injunction with the Supreme Court against the NEC, seeking a halt to the vote counting until their grievances were addressed. As result of this action, which threatened to derail the electoral process, members of the diplomatic community, including CDA, the UK High Commissioner, the UN ERSG, the Chinese Ambassador, the Head of the European Commission and the Nigerian High Commissioner, sought meetings with both candidates.

¶10. (C) During the subsequent SLPP meeting the same day, September 15, Berewa explained that the injunction was filed as a result of differences in the SLPP manual vote tally culled from the polling station results and those announced by the NEC. He noted that a complaint had been submitted to the NEC in accordance with established procedures on September 14. Since the SLPP had not received a response from the NEC, the party filed an injunction with the Supreme Court. Berewa professed surprise to learn that SLPP spokesperson Victor Reider had announced the filing on SLPP radio. The diplomatic community also expressed grave concerns over the rising rhetoric by SLPP affiliated media threatening the NEC its head, Dr. Christiana Thorpe, as well as the UN electoral experts. Berewa promised to put an end to it.

¶10. Moments after the meeting had ended; Berewa contacted ERSG Victor Angelo to inform him that the injunction would be withdrawn, since &London, Washington, Beijing, Brussels and Abuja8 were clearly concerned that such an action could upset the electoral process. (Note: Ultimately, it may never be known whether he intended to fulfill his promise since the early (10 a.m.) September 17 NEC announcement trumped a final Supreme Court decision on whether to accept the injunction. End note.)

KOROMA PLEDGES UNITY

¶11. (C) In a separate meeting the same day, September 15, APC Candidate Koroma pledged, if elected, to form a government of national unity and seek candidates for government positions, regardless of party affiliation. He also promised to encourage his supporters to stay calm and patient until and after the election results announcement.

SWEARING IN AND NEXT STEPS

¶12. (U) As required by the Constitution, the President assumes office on the day he is declared elected. He will be sworn into office September 17, hours after the announcement of results, at 1700 GMT at the State House in Freetown. Koroma will need to establish a ministerial cabinet, oversee the opening of Parliament and encourage all government offices) most of which have been on hold during the past month) to resume the business of running the country.

¶13. (U) Civil society members, including media and religious organizations, have created a Committee for a Smooth Change of Government. This temporary group has met with both SLPP and APC Presidential candidates to discuss the need for both parties to encourage their supporters to accept the results of the election and to turn their focus back towards national unity and peace. The committee is particularly interested in working with the new government to persuade civil servants to return to business as usual.

COMMENT

¶14. (U) Despite the mounting tensions of the past week awaiting the results, Sierra Leoneans remained relatively calm and patient. We have every reason to believe that the majority of Sierra Leoneans will move forward and accept the final outcome. Despite evidence of internal strife amongst the NEC Commissioners and external threats against them, the NEC under Dr. Thorpe's leadership conducted themselves in a transparent and credible manner. The Sierra Leone Police also deserve credit for having managed to remain impartial through the process. Because of such unwavering commitment to upholding the transparency and credibility of the process, Dr. Thorpe and the electoral team effectively ensured that Sierra Leone's first civilian-led transfer of Presidential

authority since the end of the 10-year civil war was a
success. END COMMENT.

PRATT